CHRISTIAN DEITY

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THE CHRISTIAN DEITY.

BY CHARLES WATTS.

IT is not here intended to enter upon the perplexed question of the existence of *a* God, but rather to inquire into the character of the Deity as given by the Bible. This inquiry touches the very foundation of orthodox Christianity; for all adherents to the popular faith, to be consistent, must endorse the Biblical account of "Our Father who art in Heaven." It is true that many professed Christians do not believe that Deity was guilty of the crimes, weaknesses, and inconsistencies ascribed to him by the Bible, while others seek to justify his reported conduct upon the assumption that finite man cannot judge of "divine" justice and goodness; it is urged, therefore, that the objectionable doings recorded of God in the Bible, may be "divinely" right, although they are opposed to human ideas of morality. The fallacy of this position was shown by Professor Jowett, who in his sermon on "God is Love," remarked: "If it be said that God's ways are not man's, then the fatal principle of a double morality is introduced; and he who represents God's character as above any affinity with man's, launches into an uncertain sea of speculation that may swallow him up—is as a person sawing off the branch on which he sat, thereby severing himself from all that upheld him." Besides, is it not folly to ask us to worship a being, if we can have no conception of his attributes? If justice and truth with us mean something else with God, what guarantee have we in any instance that we are obeying his will? The character of the Bible Deity is set forth for our emulation: "Be ye holy as I am holy," "Be ye perfect, even as your heavenly father is perfect," is the language of Scripture; but how can we do this unless we are enabled to understand what that character is? And to threaten punishment for not believing in a being whose conduct we cannot understand, is to encourage blind belief rather than the honest convictions of judgment.

The Bible description of its Deity is at once amusing and contradictory. St. John tells us that God is a spirit, and St. Luke informs us that a spirit has neither flesh nor bones. Other parts of Scripture allege that God has both flesh and blood. Thus we have an immaterial Being, who is composed of material parts, a somebody, or rather a nobody; having no legs, yet walking about in the garden of Eden; having no hands, yet fashioning man from the dust; having no lungs, yet breathing into Adam's nostrils; having no tongue, yet cursing the serpent. A wonderful being, truly! He is also represented as possessing human weaknesses and human passions, as limited in power, in knowledge, and in

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goodness; as dwelling in his peculiar and elevated habitation, in some remote region beyond everywhere, which is nowhere, above and below, filling all space, yet absent from Shinar and Gomorrah. He also appears to be ignorant of what is going on in many parts of the world; hence we find, that in order to get information as to current events, he resorts to questionable means, such as seeking the assistance of evil spirits, urging them to devise and offer plans for his acceptance or rejection, whereby he may thwart the intentions of his subjects, and ultimately he receives and approves of a scheme based on falsehood and treachery.

The Bible further depicts its Deity as appearing at different times in different characters. Sometimes as a debater, his opponent getting the better of the argument, and causing God, who it is said never changes, to change his opinion; other times as a wrestler, again suffering defeat from his antagonist. Sometimes he appears as a savage bear, or voracious leopard, other times as a man who had taken too much wine. Occasionally he appears as a lover of peace, but more frequently in his original character as a warrior; in fact, he excelled so well in this character, that it appears he took pupils, and gave lessons in the art of fighting, and according to the statements of one of his scholars, his teaching was very effectual. This may be accounted for by the fact that he kept his pupils at sharp practice in killing their fellow-creatures, and rarely afforded them very long vacations. He also appears as one who knows not how to act with propriety towards those over whom he rules, who busied himself by laying snares to entrap them, trials to weary them, and temptations to entice them, and then inflicting torture upon them for doing that which it was impossible for them to avoid. He is represented as unjust, inasmuch as his general rule was to punish the innocent for the crimes of the guilty, as destroying a whole nation for alleged sins of a part, as killing seventy thousand human beings for the crime of one man, and further, as prompting that one man to commit the crime which incurred such wholesale slaughter. He is described as cruel in threatening death to his first human child for one offence, as destroying the whole human race, one family excepted, in the most heartrending and reckless manner; as commanding his servants to commit human slaughter without the slightest reserve, killing both old and young—mothers, tender infants, and fair maids, and hardening the hearts of the poor victims that they may come out to battle to be utterly destroyed. The character of the Christian Deity, as set forth in the Bible, is one of deceit and revenge, of partiality and folly, of pandering to the worst of human passions, and encouraging the grossest form of vice. To read of the acts of the *Lord of Hosts* and the *God of Battles* as recorded in the Old Testament, is revolting enough, but what effect would be produced if we could but discover the long-lost book of the "Wars of the Lord," is better imagined than described.

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The Bible character of God is continuously and consistently cruel. Vengeful inadequately expresses the character of his cruelty; vengeful implies some kind of offence committed against the vengeful one, and the universal instinct of morality and humanity execrates with tenfold degree of indignation, cruelties committed in wantonness, cruelties committed without a cause, as compared with cruelties committed in reprisal for some hurt or injury. The latter have, at least, the comparative palliation of natural irritation to produce them. But the essence of the charge against the Christian God is, that he has not even this excuse. He deliberately implants in the hearts of his creatures those springs of evil, whose natural and inevitable pre-destined and pre-ordained fruit he afterwards chastises with all the rigour of his rule. What, for instance, can be more wantonly cruel than the conduct of this Deity to our alleged first parents? He placed them in a paradise, where everything is described as calculated to please the eye, cheer the heart, and enrich the mind, only to make the pangs and sufferings of the desert, into which they were afterwards plunged, the more painful and severe. He implants the instinct of love, and the holy feelings of conjugal and paternal relation, only to inflict the immediate keenness of the giving birth to a murderer and a fratricide, and the still further sorrow of the reflection that the parents are to be the progenitors of myriads of human beings; each one of whom shall be the inheritor of their curse, and from the seed of whom it shall never depart, even after the most painful and protracted probation. With a cruelty that is more ingenious, if possible, than all the rest, the very woman whom God sends as a helpmeet and a solace to man, is, in the order of God's providence, made the cause of all his woe, the curse of the world, the introducer of evil, and the desecrator of the earth. "Better, far better," Adam might have said to Deity, "had it been that you made me spiritless and unintelligent, as the lowest and most despised of the brute creation, than to endow me with rational curiosity and an inquiring mind, which, in combination with the allurements of the companion you gave me, and the temptations with which you surrounded me, has been the cause of my moral degradation and physical suffering." Is it not to be regretted that a God of infinite power, instead of making his children recipients of happiness and comfort, should enact a scene which he knew would incur for them misery and woe?

There is a remarkable feature which characterises many of the cruelties of the Christian Deity. Those who are conversant with the Bible will remember that on several occasions God causes the severest and most heartrending sorrows to spring from what appears to be the sweetest and most perennial joys. Perhaps no pleasure is so lasting, no joy so great, as the emotion of gladness when for the first time a new life has been ushered into the world—the result of the love and affection of two human hearts. To most persons such a pleasure proves the sweetest

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solace of the trials of life. But in cases where the morning, and even the mid-day, of life are past without being blessed with such a comfort, how great must be the joy, how intense the delight, to find that in the evening of existence the hope and expectations of a whole life are being realised. The rapture is all the greater if its realisation were unexpected. And among all the various forms of human affections not one is stronger, if there are any so strong, as that which binds parents who have attained to full maturity of years to the new-born children of their old age. This, according to the Bible, was the case with Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac. God attacks the heart of Abraham in the very part the most vulnerable. Isaac is born in the very evening of Sarah's existence. Beyond this, Abraham is led by God to entertain the gravest and most ambitious hopes of his son, hopes the accomplishment of which naturally imply the preservation and long life of the child. From his loins are to spring a mighty and marvellous nation. His descendants are to dwell as kings and rulers, where Abraham had been a sojourner. Abraham is also taught that he is to have the honour, through Isaac and many further generations, to be the progenitor of that Messiah, who was to heal the nations, and undo the mischief said to have been effected in the garden of Eden. Through Isaac "all men are to call Abraham blessed." Now, who can conceive cruelty more keen than the recklessness with which God, who, after raising the hopes and expectations of Abraham, immediately dashes the cup of all this blessedness from his lips, and pretends to destroy the fruit of his natural affections, which he thought he should now live to enjoy? Apart from the agony the patriarch must have experienced at the thought of being the murderer of his own child, what must the youthful Isaac have felt when he was bound and laid upon the altar, seeing that knife glittering which was expected soon to have been plunged into his youthful body? What moral lesson can be learnt from this cruel act? Was it to try the faith of Abraham? But this was useless, inasmuch as the All-wise knew exactly the extent of Abraham's faith prior to this sham sacrifice. Was it to bequeath a lesson to posterity. But could not Deity, being all-powerful, have selected less inhuman means for such a purpose? Besides, where was the necessity of inflicting torture upon the son simply to test the father? similar act of cruelty is exhibited in the story of Jacob, Joseph, and his brethren. Here the detailed circumstances are somewhat different, but the main principle is the same. Jacob is struck in the tenderest part of human affections. First, God, designing all along the abduction of Joseph; and knowing he would be sold by his brethren, makes him the apple of Jacob's eye, and induces the old man to lavish upon Joseph the whole wealth of his paternal affection. Joseph is then sent away, and the father has not even the comparative consolation of knowing that his son is not slain.

But the Christian Deity's mode of dealing with nations is similar to his treatment of individuals. The story of Joseph

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leads us to the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt. And here we notice the very severe trials and cruelties God inflicted both upon the Jews and Egyptians during the former's captivity. According to all human canons of morality and retribution, it was not the Egyptian subjects who were responsible for the sufferings inflicted upon the Jews; yet God, according to his usual plan, mixes up the innocent with the guilty, inflicts certain blights and curses, not only upon the Pharaohs, but upon the whole land of Egypt. With a cruelty as much directed against Pharaoh himself, as against the Jews, his victims, God "hardened" Pharaoh's heart, and made him do evil, and then inflicted upon him, and his host, punishments for sin, in which the latter had no share, and for which the former was not responsible, for he acted as God compelled him to act. Need we marvel that men of refined minds hesitate to worship such a being as is here described? A God that could inflict such miseries and misfortunes upon a nation as the Jews and Egyptians are said to have endured, is unworthy of the love of any people. Again and again did God harden the heart of Pharaoh for the express purpose, if the Bible be true, of having an opportunity of torturing, not only the monarch, but thousands of innocent creatures, who were victims to the crimes of an avenging God. Oh Christians, if you are men, do not attempt to palliate such brutality! As related in the Bible, it is a tale of horror, the perusal of which causes our very humanity to shudder.

The conduct of the Christian Deity to his chosen people cannot exalt him very highly in the estimation of the unprejudiced student. It should be remembered, that whatever acts were performed by the Jews may fairly be taken as God's, for their government was a theocracy; he was their ruler and guide. He made them a nation and gave them Moses as a leader. The Jews were God's peculiar people; they were also, as their history testifies, a curse to those with whom they came in contact. From the day on which Miriam celebrated their safe passage through the Red Sea, to the time when the sun is said to have darkened at the crucifixion, they were destroyers of human life, and the instruments of God's wrath on all their neighbours. They began by robbing peoples with whom they had no legitimate quarrel of the possession of their territories, and they proceeded in like spirit to the end of their Bible history. Apparently they never thought it necessary to have a cause for their disputes, but were content to obey the behests to fight and slay those around them. They were, on certain occasions, blamed by their God for not slaying enough. Saul, one of their kings, had his kingdom taken from him because he failed, after a war which had produced much carnage, to tear in pieces before the God of mercy Agag, his royal captive. Saul having declined to perform this inhuman act, Samuel, God's priest and prophet, "hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord," and thereby gave divine sanction to as brutal a piece of butchery in cold blood as was ever recorded. Why, the cruelties of the late Franco-Prussian war, with all their horrifying associations, sink

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into comparative obscurity when compared with this savage and revolting act of barbarism. But now comes the crowning point of all. God, it would appear, had not had enough of the cruelties of his favourite race. He therefore gave them another victim to torture and to kill. Hitherto they have practised their cruelties only on human, and of course inferior creatures. God now gives them himself to crucify and to slay. The absurdity of this foolish deed is not now questioned, but rather its cruelty. It was certainly a fitting culmination to the whole story—a story bathed in blood from beginning to end—the story of a body of divinely-inspired and misguided marauders and murderers, who rob and kill from their first foundation as a nation to the cessation of their national existence, who, when they find themselves compressed within, and coerced by the strength of the great Roman Empire, and can no longer make war on men, impiously, as it were, scale the very walls of heaven, drag down the Deity from his throne, and crucify their creator in the world he had created. Then the Deity as depicted in the Bible, "appears on earth in the shape of a man, born of a woman, the son of a carpenter, found in a stable, nursed in a manger, driven about by these very Jews from place to place, having nowhere to lay his head, scourged, tried, and condemned to death for disturbing the public tranquillity, expiring on the cross, and being entombed in a sepulchre." Is it not mockery to ask us to believe that such a being is "our Father, who art in Heaven?"

In Numbers xvi. Deity is credited with a reckless massacre. The account informs us that several individuals were under the impression that Moses had deceived them, and, smarting under disappointment, they gathered themselves together, and complained to Moses and Aaron, urging that they had taken too much upon them. Upon hearing this, Moses fell upon his face. No wonder he hid his face, for if he had any conscience at all he must have felt his humiliating position. But Moses, who was a "meek" man, was not to be defeated; he therefore charges his victims with rebellion, and invites them to go up before the Lord to test who is in the right, taking particular care however to ask the Lord *beforehand* to respect not their offering. When the parties appeared before the Lord, the Christian Deity ordered Moses and Aaron to separate themselves from among the congregation that he (God) may consume them in a moment. On hearing this command, the people fell on the ground and implored him not to carry out his cruel intent. Notwithstanding their supplications, Deity, after, according to Moses, being the cause of all their misfortunes, shows them no mercy, not even justice; but when the men were gathered together the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up; and all that appertained to them went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them; and they perished from among the congregation. Immediately after this there came a fire from the Lord, and consumed another two hundred and fifty men. So horrified were God's own people at this sacrifice of life, that they com-

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plained that the people had perished in such a frightful manner. And for this very pardonable act on their part the Lord sent a plague to consume *them*, and would not abate his anger until Aaron had made an atonement for the people. "Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred," beside those who were buried alive, and those that were consumed by fire.

A terrible account is given of the commands of Deity in Numbers xxxi., in which God says unto Moses: "Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people. And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the Lord of Midian. And they warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses; and they slew all the males." They also burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire. And they took all the spoil and all the prey, both of men and of beasts, which they brought unto the priest. At first the God-appointed butchers spared the women and children belonging to their victims, but when Moses heard of the mercy shown by his subordinates, he was exceeding wroth, and on being assured of its truth he exclaimed, with all the rage of a savage, "Kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves," and they slew in cold blood thousands of mothers and innocent children, and gave the young daughters to the murderers of their parents and brothers. The number of daughters thus given was, we are told, thirty-two thousand. Colenso estimates that in this war one hundred and sixteen thousand persons in all fell victims. And this was done, be it remembered, by the express command of the Christian Deity. Shortly after this occurrence we have another record of slaughtering men, women, and children "with the edge of the sword," by Joshua, at the request of Deity, vanquishing kings and hanging them on trees. Even the sun and moon are made to stand still till the devastation is completed. A history is then given of the spoliation of numerous cities wherein the people were destroyed, and the narrative concludes by saying that Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and "left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded." To what cause shall we attribute all this misery, this ruin, this enormous sacrifice of human life, with all its lamentable consequences? To the fault of the people? The Bible does not say so, reason does not confirm such a supposition, for no amount of error, mischief, or crime could justify such conduct as is here recorded. It is only, however, to read Joshua xi. 20, to find that the Deity himself is the sole cause of this fearful carnage: "For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel to battle that he might destroy them utterly as the Lord commanded Moses." The Christian

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Biblical Deity is represented as sending down stones from heaven, upon men who were on their way home after escaping the dangers of the battlefield, and killing more in this wanton manner than those who died by the sword. In 2 Samuel xii. he is reported as planning an act of adultery, while in the case of Jehu, 2 Kings x., it is stated that God positively rewards him and his posterity for deceit and murder. To traffic in human flesh and blood is admitted to be reprehensible in man. It must be equally, if not more so, in God, and yet the Bible relates that he will sell the sons and daughters of men; also that he gave cruel and unnatural laws for the regulation of slavery, and the torture of its victims. He is also described as sacrificing the comfort of women to the passions and vices of men, and in Numbers v. he sanctions the most indecent method of testing female virtue. Nahum states that the Lord revengeth, is furious, and will take vengeance; in Exodus, it plainly says that he raised the people up that he may cut them off with a pestilence, and Jeremiah reproaches Deity thus: "The young and the old lie on the ground in the streets; my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword; thou hast slain them in the day of thine anger; thou hast killed and not pitied." Well may Mackay, in his "Rise and Progress of Christianity," observe that "if we go to the God of the Bible expecting to find a friend and a father, we are repelled at beholding a God of fear, a jealous tyrant, who, himself instigates to the crime he condemns, and hardens men's hearts in order to signalise his glory by punishing them." The Bible represents its Deity, in Leviticus, as giving, on many occasions, a host of ridiculous, disgusting, and unnatural rules as to diet, dress, and treatment of the body, and asserts that he is over scrupulous as to who shall approach the altar.

In drawing attention thus to the nature and conduct of the Christian Deity, the object has been to show the character the Bible gives to the God of orthodox Christendom. If it is urged against the course here pursued, that due respect has not been paid to the feelings of orthodox worshippers, the reply is, that it is a duty we owe to society to expose error and superstition when and wherever we find it obstructing the progress of intelligence, human happiness, and mental freedom. Bishop Watson gave good advice when he said: "An honest man, sincere in his endeavours to search out truth in reading the Bible, would examine first whether the Bible attributed to the Supreme Being any attributes repugnant to holiness, truth, justice, and goodness." Having acted upon the Bishop's advice, the conclusion arrived at is, that the conduct of the Bible God is the very opposite of what we consider should emanate from justice and goodness. Is it not better, therefore, "to have no opinion of the gods at all than such as cast discredit upon them?"

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